

INDUSTRIAL CONTROLLER FOR MACHINE TOOLS, ROBOTS
AND/OR PRODUCTION MACHINES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to industrial controllers for machine tools, robots and/or production machines, in which devices are provided for registering alarms and/or messages for predefinable operating states.

10 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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15 Modern numerical controllers contain diagnostic modules, i.e., permanent or specially activatable monitoring functions for machine and control responses for the purpose of automatically documenting and displaying alarms, messages about operating states and the causes thereof. To this end, the numerical controller's display device can show an image of the relevant measured values as a curve, a graph and the like, or the diagnostic results can of course be displayed
20 alphanumerically. Alternatively, such data can be output via interfaces, which allows remote diagnosis (see, e.g., Hans B. Kief "NC/CNC Handbuch" 1995/96, Carl Hanser Verlag, Munich, Vienna, page 58).

25 It is also convention to forward reportable operating states in the context of programmable logic controllers. In this case, previously defined alerting and escalation strategies can be used to call a predefined group of persons automatically and to inform this group of persons about the necessary actions to be taken, using textual displays and
30 voice announcements (see, e.g., Special tooling 6/99, page 60 ff. "Hier spricht ihre Steuerung").

35 In both cases, however, simple configuration of which receivers are to be informed about alarms and/or messages to which depth of information is neither known nor disclosed.

SUMMARY

An object of the present invention is to provide an industrial

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controller so that information having optimum correspondence to the respective alarm or to the respective message can be allocated for maintenance and operating personnel.

5 According to the present invention, predefined operating states are allocated on an individual basis by means of a converter, to the effect that, if these operating states are present, an SMS message and/or an e-mail about the respective operating state is sent to a predefined distribution group.

10 By virtue of the feature that the e-mails can, if required, have files, particularly trace files, attached to them, an operating sequence (as an example) immediately preceding the message or the alarm can be documented in detail and communicated to the person who is to be informed.

15 According to a further example embodiment of the present invention, the allocation is effected by editing using an operating keyboard on the controller. This allows separate programming aids to be dispensed with.

20 By virtue of the feature that the converter, in addition to the predefinable operating states, can use a bit poll to trigger a respective alarm and/or message for a specific operating state, further operating states can also be configured as reportable, and these further operating states therefore do not need to be part of the predefinable operating states.

25 30 To the extent that, when the predefined or specific operating states arise, an SMS message and/or an e-mail about the respective operating state is sent to a predefined distribution group, an immediate response from the message mechanism is ensured and it is possible to dispense with continuous cyclical polling.

35 The present invention thus allows rapid, comprehensive and

exact information by means of alarms and operating messages to the various sites in a company operating the machine, or to firms providing services (including machine manufacturers). The procedure to date, where faults, equipment shutdowns, etc., are passed on, usually orally, from the worker to the supervisor and so on until, finally, a hotline or a service provider is reached, can thus be bypassed, so that it is no longer the case that, as previously, information is lost or queries regarding a machine, a software level, the location of the machine, data relating to faults, such as trace files, etc. are necessary. The present invention thus allows the aforementioned data to be sent quickly and in the simplest of manners by e-mail to any desired e-mail receiver using the Internet. This means that it is also possible to inform a hotline at any site in the world about this fault or message, irrespective of time. Furthermore, it also allows a plurality of receivers to be defined, these receivers thus immediately having the same level of information as each other. Depending on the relevant alarms or the relevant message, the reaction can then be of various type and manner.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The FIGURE shows an example embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The FIGURE shows a block diagram of a machine tool WZM whose operation is controlled by a numerical controller NC which, in turn, has an interface controller PLC alongside it. Data is interchanged between the numerical controller NC, the interface controller PLC and the machine tool WZM via a bus system B1. The numerical controller NC also includes a control panel BT, which is connected to the numerical controller NC via a bus system B2. The control panel BT has an associated display D for showing the desired or actual operation of the machine tool WZM. In addition, a keyboard T for an operator to input data is also provided on the control panel BT.

Included in the operating system of the numerical controller is a series of servers, server S1 and S2, which are allocated to the control panel BT in the illustrative embodiment. In this arrangement, the server S1 can know all the NC variables and PLC variables and parameters, as indicated by the label NCDDE. The server S2 can be regarded as an alarm server, which is indicated by the label MBDDDE. Further servers are shown only in dashed lines.

According to the present invention, a converter U, whether designed using hardware or software, can access the server S2 via a bus system B3 and thus always reacts when the alarm server S2 contains a state in the numerical controller NC, in the interface controller PLC or in the machine tool WZM as an alarm or occurrence of a message. The converter U uses a table function, which is stored in it, to define which alarm or which message is allocated, which may include:

1. list of persons or sites to be informed,
2. relevant short information as e-mail, possibly limited to SMS format, and
3. further files, to be attached to an e-mail.

When this allocation has taken place, a bus system B4 is used to activate a transmission device SE, for example a modem, as an e-mail client, and the receivers, be they pure SMS receivers, which can process only 160 characters, or be they normal e-mail receivers EM1 and EM2, for example PCs, receive the sent information via a switching facility VE used as an e-mail server. The relevant information stream is indicated in dashed lines in this case.

The allocation function of the converter U can, as indicated by a line L1, be configured by the user, using the keyboard T on the control panel BT.

If the number of alarms and/or messages usually present in the

server S2 is insufficient and very specific further operating states of the numerical controller NC, the interface controller PLC and/or the machine tool WZM need to be polled, the converter U and a line L2 can be used, in this context, to initiate a bit poll, i.e., the system is informed of those predefined states of the numerical controller NC, the interface controller PLC and the machine tool WZM for which a relevant operating state is subsequently reported in the server S2, said operating state then being detected immediately by the converter U, as a result of which the appropriate message is sent to the selected group of interested parties.

The e-mail client (SE) is thus always informed by the alarm server S2 when there are new alarms. The e-mail client (SE) in turn uses the converter U to search through the previously configured list of alarms (including messages) and associated interested parties, as well as the textual description, subsequently establishes a connection to the e-mail server (VE) and then sends the appropriate e-mails or SMS communications. In this case, the alarms reported by the alarm server S2 contain not only the predefined alarms, but can also contain specific alarms and other messages. Configuration is carried out for all alarms which are to be sent by e-mail and/or SMS, particularly a plurality of individual alarms and number sets, and also receivers to be informed of this notification as well as files which are to be attached by e-mail.

The e-mail's subject line can then contain the respective alarm number in addition to the actual text of the alarm and/or message in the respective language which is set. The time at which the alarm was registered can also be forwarded. If the same alarms are passed to different receivers, it is possible for the service center to be informed about all alarms and/or messages by e-mail and for the service personnel to be contacted by SMS, on a mobile phone, only about special

alarms and/or messages. The alarms and/or messages can, of course, remain stored in the transmission path, particularly in the switching facility VE, i.e. the e-mail server, for a presettable time.

006T60-2164960